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ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY.*

The first fresh spontaneous creations of the human mind would seem to be perpetual in their influence, and have the witchery and charm of a beautiful ingenuous childhood. The theology of the Hebrews, the philosophy of the Greeks, and the jurisprudence of the Romans, have fermented, and will perhaps always continue to ferment, in the minds of all cultivated men. The flight of centuries has in no way diminished their potency; and even the comparatively few who have had mental power enough to surpass them, have drawn in their highest inspirations from them. Minds susceptible of much cultivation, but without any progressive power, have always continued to revolve around one or the other of these three forms of human culture, and many have deemed them as final points in the mental growth of our race. Their successive and comparative history, however, would be the best revelation of the past to the future, as well as the best elucidation of the present. All human speculation is yet as fragmentary as it is incomplete, notwithstanding the extent of some men's erudition, and the theoretical activity of others. Thus it would seem that the progress of the individually gifted is retarded and held in check by the slow enlightenment of the many, whose mental condition is definitely proportioned to that of the great pioneers who lead, if they do not direct, the slow-pacing multitude. The evolution of knowledge on the part of the gifted few, is only widely effective when the many are in a mental and moral condition to receive it. Millions have lived and died during past centuries, through whose dark minds not one ray of Hebrew, Greek, or Roman culture ever passed. Pure air may pass through chronically diseased lungs without any effect, and so may pure knowledge exist without influencing psychologically diseased, immature, or imperfect minds. The highest intellect is that which discovers or evolves knowledge; next to that is the intellect capable of giving a wide and effective diffusion to knowledge already existing. In this latter category, we must include the author of the work before us. To some fancy and imagination he adds much rhetorical freshness and ability, which gives a certain charm to his lectures. If he has cast a particle of originality on any part of his subject, it is that which treats of Greek philosophy as represented by Plato. In fact, he is himself organically a Platonist. His thoughts are rather rich in their verbal clothing than in their naked reality. He is better qualified to talk about what other men have thought and written, than to show how their thoughts have grown out of the past, and how they are destined to germinate into the future, through their vitality in the present. As an academician, Professor Butler had his merit as a lecturer to young men; but as a philosopher, addressing men of thought, experience, and cerebral maturity, we cannot rank him very high, nor will his lectures

have much effect on this latter class. It is the misfortune of men like Professor Butler to be the echo, however eloquently, of other men, and men too of the Platonic school, who seem to have an irresistible attraction for them. The limited experiences, the limited sufferings, the limited contact with human nature, in all its varied conditions, which generally fall to the lot of academicians, render their speculations valuable only when their own natures are universal reflectors of all the thoughts, feelings, and impulses which characterize man in all the social and individual conditions of his existence. Our professor, as a lettered man, rather than a man of thought, has a graceful, winning, poetical style, which will give him many delighted readers, and many devoted admirers. The following extracts from one of his lectures will confirm what we say:

From the mysterious forms of the Indian mythological philosophy, from the vast sacerdotal institutions that have produced and protected it, from that petrification of living society in one immutable attitude which contrasts so wonderfully with the changing world of ordinary history—we pass to a very different scene. We pass to that country, four centuries of whose existence possess a share in the thoughts of every educated man, as extensive, it may be truly affirmed, as all the remaining mass of ancient profane history! We come to that country to which the filial devotion of every cultivator of his own intelligence turns as to the mother-country of the mind; to which every man instinctively points when he would illustrate the indefeasible claims and inherent destinies of human nature. A speck of the globe—a few cities on either side of a narrow sea, dotted with isles, scarcely discoverable on the chart of a continent—has been the outward and visible scene for the successive apparition of the whole universe of mind. On that little theatre of mental action, and in the rapid development of a couple of busy ages, performers have played their part, who, even after the vast European movement of our later centuries, still preserve, if not their exclusive authority unquestioned, at least their intellectual eminence unshaken. There poetry still finds in many departments her most exquisite examples, there (and perhaps there alone) sculpture finds her ideal cease to be a dream; there painting, doubtless, may lament that her more perishable materials should have defrauded her of her triumphs, and music, that her achievements must be received upon the faith of history; there philosophy has at least directed her course to every point of the compass of thought, and touched at all its points of access; and there, finally, language, on whose ministrant services reason and imagination are alike so dependent, arrived, even in its infancy, at a perfection which made its proud and conscious possessors to class all who spoke not their own melodious tongue by one indiscriminate appellation characteristic of their vocal inferiority.

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Greece had already some elements prophetic of civilization. She was singularly free from the contracting institutions of the East, and by some early essays of maritime communication she had learned to import thought as well as wealth. A religion, diversified and practical in its forms, already gave occupation to the fancy; the names of Orpheus, Linus, Musæus, belong alike to the religion and the poetry of antiquity. The Argonautic expedition (whatever its duration and extent), the great

* Lectures on the History of Ancient Philosophy, by William Archer Butler, M.A., 2 vols. Parry & McMillan, Philadelphia, 1857.

national movement against Troy, must have increased the stores of thought, though attended, it would seem, with much domestic calamity; and the latter attests the progress of the Grecian states to the great principle of national unity, one of the most fertile sources of civilization.

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The period from which we may date the real impulse of intellect and imagination in Greece, I would place about that time, not very distinctly marked perhaps in chronology, when the old kingly institutions sank almost everywhere before the democratic principle, and Greece assumed the form of an aggregate of small republics, connected by a national feeling, reverence for ancestry, unity of religion and oracles, and the universal Amphictyonic Council. Democracy made Greece never tranquil, but it made her always brilliant. It made distinction the prize of eloquence; and, until the people became itself a tyrant, it threw open a free path to speculation. These advantages existed at a dear price, but still they existed. The passion for glory, the fervor of emulation, is a troubled light for a nation to walk by; but yet it guides where no other light can carry: and it is not for posterity to blame Greece if she sacrificed herself for its opinion!

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To those who perceive how, in the progress of the human mind, all things are connected with all, it will not be chimerical to add, as an antecedent and motive to the essay at philosophical system in Greece, the study of art itself, and the boundless admiration of its performances, which was ever so strong a characteristic of the Grecian people. The study of art has two tendencies corresponding to its two elements. A work of art is the realization in the sensible world of ideas and relations that belong to the world of thought. To a vain and sensual people, or to that class among a people, the works of art will delight the sense, and pass no further than the eye and ear. But it is not so with the higher few, who either produce such works, or are critics worthy to appreciate them. To such, the visible or the audible is mainly valued, as it is the type and symbol of those conceptions of order and of harmony at which the outward work points, if it does not realize them. The sensible object, even the connected associations, so manifold and so magical, are to such thinkers only the vestibule and the antechamber that lead the mind to repose in those loftier principles of symmetry which, as they are anterior to the art and to the artist, are by a natural extension, held anterior to that great achievement of the greatest of artists—the universe itself—and to form, in truth, its plan, its basis, and its framework.

What constituted Greece the cradle of Philosophy, of Art, and of Religion, has never been fairly discussed, with a view of throwing light on the history of the human mind. What was peculiar in the genius of the Grecian people themselves—what in their climate, and what in their social, political, and civic condition? They came up out of the mist of antiquity, and brilliantly flashed themselves on the canvas of national life, and took the seal of immortality. Greece alone is the fruitful source of those mental fountains, out of which have issued streams of culture suited to all races and conditions, to all ages and temperaments.

The Orient grows pale before the affluently progressive nature of the Greek mind. In the soul of Homer, poetry has its eternal foundations; in the heart of Socrates,

morality swept out of its fragmentary curves into the straight lines of intelligible notions. In the encyclopedic mind of Aristotle, science branched off into all its varied forms, which have set into eternal motion the perpetually investigating spirit peculiar to man. In Plato, we have poetry, eloquence, and philosophy, so intermingled as to lose their own individual characteristics, and to form a peculiarity in mental phenomena which has often been imitated, often organically repeated, but which has never yet been explained.

We must not wonder, then, at the continually repeated efforts of every generation to dig into the mysteries of ancient culture, seeing that its nature is not yet understood, nor its historical growth comprehended. There is an ignorant perversity in men's minds which excludes them from seeing the law of continuity in the growth of all forms of knowledge, rendering it inevitable that one form should be evolved out of the other, and that herein there are no independent creations, but successive developments, to which each race and generation has and will continue to contribute their destined portion.

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SENTIMENT OF BEAUTY.—Some there are, who contend that the laws of taste are not primitive, but secondary; that our admiration of beauty in material objects is resolvable into other and original emotions, and, more especially, by means of the associating principle, into our admiration of moral excellence. Let the justness of this doctrine be admitted, and its only effect on our peculiar argument is, that the benevolence of God, in thus multiplying our enjoyments, instead of being indicated by a distinct law for suiting the human mind to the objects which surround it, is indicated both by the distribution of those objects, and by their investment with such qualities as suit them to the previous constitution of the mind—that he hath pencilled them with the very colors, or moulded them into the very shapes which suggest either the graceful or the noble of human character; that he hath imparted to the violet its hue of modesty, and clothed the lily in its robe of purest innocence, and given to the trees of the forest their respective attitudes of strength or delicacy; and made the whole face of nature one bright reflection of those virtues which the mind and character of man had originally radiated. If it be not the implantation of a peculiar law in mind, it is, at least, by a peculiar disposition of tints and forms in external nature, that he hath spread so diversified a loveliness over the panorama of visible things; and thrown so many walks of enchantment around us; and turned the sights and the sounds of rural scenery into the ministers of so much and such exquisite enjoyment; and caused the outer world of matter to image forth in such profusion those various qualities, which at first had pleased or powerfully affected us in the inner world of consciousness and thought.—*Chalmers*.

PEOPLE talk of originality—what do they mean? As soon as we are born, the surrounding world begins to operate upon us, and so on to the end. And, after all, what can we truly call our own, but *energy, power, will*? Could I point out all that I myself owe to my great forerunners and contemporaries, truly there would remain but little over!—*Goethe*.